

19990423 029

AB-30 - Paper

Relationships Between Expectations and Life and Job Satisfaction

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, are not official, and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Navy or Department of Defense.

Introduction

The early stage of the military recruiting process is built on a loosely connected series of specific, but mostly general images, associations, and "like to have"s. It is clear that some well-formed (and some not-so-well-formed) expectations already exist prior to the first meeting between recruiter and prospect.

For the job seeker, the expectations may be as clear as the money that will be earned and the training that will be received, as vague as wanting "good opportunity for advancement" or as difficult to assess as wanting to "live up to my family's expectations," or desiring to become a leader. Almost certainly a number of those expectations will be very non-specific, maybe even unrealized presumptions, having to do with work in general, persons in authority positions, types of organizations, the nature of certain kinds of work, etc. There may also be some rather specific expectations; those regarding the particular branch of service, its mission,, its leaders, its reputation in terms of job security and fairness to its people.

An excellent example can be drawn from research conducted two decades ago by the United Kingdom's Central Office of Information (1975). Results of in-depth interviews and group discussions showed that the following were perceived advantages of service in the Women's Royal Army Corps which most strongly influenced the enlistment decisions of young women: (1) anticipation of a good social life, including meeting people of similar age and interests; (2) expectation of training for an interesting and worthwhile job; (3) the fact that the Army is a total way of life, which can act as a substitute for an unsatisfactory civilian life; (4) prospects of travel and mobility; and, (5) overall standard of living offered by the Army, e.g., accommodations, reasonable pay, sports facilities. These are fairly coherent expectations. They impelled job-seeking with this particular organization. Furthermore, they appear to be reasonably accurate when considered alongside what the Women's Royal Army Corps provided.

These and similar general and specific expectations are products of the pre-recruitment phase of the military job socialization process (Ellis, 1984). They form a "relationship basis." Progressively, and particularly because of interactions during the recruiting process, there evolves a more focused set of expectations. Taken together, the expectations of the military service and the expectations of the recruit form what has been called a psychological contract (Baker, 1996).

This psychological contract—that sum total of mutual expectations—will govern the work relationship of service and recruit. Much has been written of the deleterious effects in the workplace of perceived violations of the psychological contract (e.g., Dunahee & Wangler 1974).

The pilot study for the 1998 re-administration of the Marine Corps Quality of Life Survey (Kerce, 1995) provided the opportunity to investigate whether confirmed and disconfirmed expectations might be associated with perceived quality of life.

Method

Subjects

Participating in the study were officers and enlisted personnel (n=74) stationed at Camp Pendleton, California. These individuals, male and female, and ranging in rank from Lance Corporal to Lieutenant Colonel, represented a variety of career fields within the Marine Corps, including both combat arms and support occupations. Subjects were recruited from various commands, based on availability.

Instrumentation

The Marine Corps Quality of Life Survey includes questions relating to how well pre-entry expectations in the 13 areas of duties assigned, living conditions, overall standard of living, amount of off-duty time, rate of advancement, quality of direct supervision, Marine Corps concern for their family, treatment on the job, sense of accomplishment, enjoyment of being a Marine, quality of leadership, social interactions with fellow Marines, and level of responsibility in their work have been borne out in subsequent experience in the Marine Corps. Other questions in the survey measured overall satisfaction with life, and overall job satisfaction.

Procedures

Data were collected at Camp Pendleton in November and December, 1997. Data collection was coordinated through the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation office. In effect, participant selection was random. Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to answer any question. There was no time limit for completing the

questionnaire. Subsequent to completion, all instruments were collected and processed for scoring and analysis.

Assumptions

- (1) Officers and enlisted personnel who participated were highly representative of Marine Corps personnel in general.
- (2) The survey questions, and the instructions for completing the questionnaire, were understood by the participants.
- (3) Participants responded to all items candidly.

Results and Discussion

Using SPSS, correlations were computed between the mean response on each of the 13 expectation elements and the mean response on (1) satisfaction with "your job overall"; and (2) on satisfaction with "your life overall." Results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. All correlations at .23 or above are significant at the .05 level.

Table1. Correlations between Expectations Fulfillment and Job Satisfaction.

Expectations Fulfilled Concerning :

"my enjoyment of being a Marine"	(.71)
"my sense of accomplishment in my work"	(.57)
"the way I'm treated on the job"	(.51)
"the quality of leadership I receive"	(.50)
"the quality of direct supervision I receive"	(.48)
"the Duties I have been assigned"	(.47)
"the level of responsibility of my work"	(.45)
"my living conditions"	(.41)
"my social interactions with fellow Marines"	(.33)
"my rate of advancement in rank"	(.29)
"my overall standard of living"	(.25)
"the amount of off duty time"	(.25)
"the Marine Corps' concern for my family"	(.17)

Not surprisingly, most highly correlated with overall job satisfaction was the fulfillment of a Marine's expectations about enjoyment of being a Marine. However, overall satisfaction with life also was most highly correlated with fulfillment of that same expectation, i.e., enjoyment of being a Marine. Similarly, for both sets of correlations, the second highest correlation was with the fulfillment of a Marine's expectations of their sense of accomplishment in their work.

Fulfillment of expectations about the quality of supervision, the way the Marine is treated on the job, and the quality of the leadership are significantly associated with both overall satisfaction with life and job satisfaction. Indeed, those correlations are both ranked third, fourth, and fifth in the two correlational distributions, although the correlations with overall life satisfaction are lower than those with job satisfaction.

Table2. Correlations between Expectations Fulfillment and Overall Satisfaction with Life.

Expectations Fulfilled Concerning :

"my enjoyment of being a Marine"	(.57)
"my sense of accomplishment in my work"	(.51)
"the way I'm treated on the job"	(.39)
"the quality of direct supervision I receive"	(.36)
"the quality of leadership I receive"	(.34)
"the amount of off duty time"	(.33)
"my living conditions"	(.32)
"the level of responsibility of my work"	(.32)
"my social interactions with fellow Marines"	(.30)
"the Marine Corps' concern for my family"	(.24)
"my overall standard of living"	(.23)
"the Duties I have been assigned"	(.22)
"my rate of advancement in rank"	(.20)

The fact that the five highest ranked correlations are exactly the same for both distributions might suggest that, for a Marine, both job and overall life satisfaction are strongly and positively associated, and that expectations associated with high and low levels of each type of satisfaction are similar in nature. In fact, correlational analysis shows that the two measures, job satisfaction and overall satisfaction with life are significantly and positively related ($r=.72$).

The least important expectation associated with Marines' job satisfaction was the Marine Corps' concern for their families. It is possible that many of these Marines, at the time of their entry in the Marine Corps, because of their young age, had not formed expectations or concerns along this line. Similarly, the pre-entry expectations about advancement in rank show little effect on overall life satisfaction, perhaps because rank attainment in the junior grades, both enlisted and officer, is nearly universal.

Mid-distribution correlations with job satisfaction had to do with expectations about the Marines' level of responsibility in their work and their social interactions with other Marines. These factors evidently bear less heavily on the job of being a Marine. Mid-distribution correlations with overall life satisfaction include living conditions and

the amount of off-duty time. It may well be that these expectations are relatively low at the time of enlistment and that the most important factors have to do with expectations about living as a Marine.

Overall, enjoyment of being a Marine and a sense of accomplishment in one's work are two elements of expectation strongly associated with both job and life satisfaction. Both are elements which become known only through experience. However, expectations regarding these are formed during the recruiting process and during early training.

Patently, expectations are the essence of any recruiting situation. Recruiting is the process of attracting potential Marines; and it is expectations that do the work of attraction. Expectations lie at the base of armed services advertising. Inducements offered, and promised assignments or duties, are presumably based on anticipated job applicant response, in other words, on expectations.

Recruiting and assignment should perhaps be more information-intensive. Scanlan (1980) said that it is necessary, early in the recruitment process to: (1) assess what is important to job applicants, and what psychological needs they seek to fulfill in their work—what their job expectations are; (2) explain some of the generalities about work life (especially in the case of young applicants); and, (3) present openly and honestly the realities of the jobs under consideration.

The results presented above indicate a strong association between fulfillment of certain pre-entry expectations and Marines' subsequently perceived satisfaction with their jobs and with life overall. Thus, the results lend weight to the often-suggested implementation of more realistic job previews of life as a Marine, delivered at the point of recruitment, and other realistic information given during subsequent training and indoctrination.

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E. Distribution Statement A: Approved for Public Release

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